



Fourteen Days that Saved the World

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'The Nazi command succeeded in forestalling our troops literally two weeks before the war began.'
General S. P. Ivanov, Chief of the General Staff Academy of the Armed Forces of the USSR, 1974.

The critical moment of World War Two – if not of the twentieth century – is generally regarded as Adolf Hitler's decision in 1941 to launch an unprovoked assault upon a hitherto neutral and peaceful Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa, as it was called, is perceived as the great tactical mistake which doomed Nazi Germany to defeat. *Icebreaker*, by Russian historian Victor Suvorov, exposes this scenario as nonsense. This extensively researched piece of historical revisionism provides compelling evidence that Operation Barbarossa was a reluctant pre-emptive strike against a massive Soviet military machine which was at that time poised to invade not just Germany, but the whole of Western Europe.

Suvorov quotes top secret Soviet documents which make it crystal clear that Soviet military theory was based on offence and the conquest of territory "for the World revolution." And this theoretical plan for offensive war was matched by practical preparations in every branch of the armed forces.

In 1939, when Britain declared war on Germany, Hitler came into the war with a total of 3,195 tanks, fewer than the Kharkov works in the Soviet Union was producing every six months on a "peace-time" footing. The Kharkov works produced the BT high speed tank which was capable of 100km/h and had a range of 700km. Based on a design by the American tank genius J. W. Christie, these tanks had their engine and transmission systems at the rear and were twenty-five years ahead of their time. By 1936, BT tanks were fording deep rivers underwater and driving along river beds.

On unmade roads the BT operated (although not very effectively) on heavy tracks, but once on good roads, the tracks were discarded and the tank raced ahead on wheels. The only real roads were to be found in western Europe, in particular the German autobahn network, for which the tanks were intended. The claim that Stalin's tanks were not ready for war is not true; they were not ready for a defensive war.

The same applied to Soviet aircraft in both numbers and quality. Communist falsifiers in the post-war period claimed that although the Soviet Union had many aircraft, they were inferior. In fact, the most heavily armed fighter in the world in 1939 was the Russian Polikarop I-16; the type 17 had two synchronised 7.62mm machine-guns and two 20mm cannons mounted on the wings, conferring a weight of fire twice that of the Messerschmitt 109E-1, and nearly three times that of the Spitfire 1.

Rocket First

Soviet aircraft builders created a plane, unique in the world, which had an armoured fusilage. The IL-2 was virtually a flying tank with extremely high powered weaponry, including eight rocket launchers. Soviet planes were the first in the world to use rockets in combat.

The fatal weakness in this formidable airforce was that none of its pilots had been trained for dog-fights with enemy planes. The Soviet battle plan relied on a massive surprise attack to knock out the enemy airforce on the ground in the first few hours of the war. By mid-June 1941, in final preparation for such a blow, Stalin's planes themselves presented an ideal target, packed wingtip to wingtip on temporary airstrips immediately behind the front line, rather than being dispersed several hundred miles to the rear as they would have been in preparation for a defensive war.

Likewise, airborne assault troops are only useful to an aggressor. Countries concerned with defence need very few. Hitler had created only 4,000 paratroopers by 1939, but Stalin already had more than a million – 200 times more than the rest of the world, including Germany, put together. There were 10 Corps, each supported by airborne artillery and even battalions of light amphibious tanks.

Soviet engineers were also hoping to land hundreds, or even thousands, of tanks in the West. Antonov, the aircraft designer, suggested that the ordinary tank be fitted with wings and a tail with its hull used as the framework. The tank crew controlled the flight by turning the turret and raising the barrel of the cannon! The entire construction of the KT was astonishingly simple. The risks of flying it even the short path between being dropped from a plane and landing on the ground were unusually great, but human life was cheap to Stalin. The idea was that just before landing the tank engine was started up and the tracks made to revolve at maximum speed. The KT then landed on its tracks and gradually braked. It is claimed that prototypes were actually flown but, like the million paratroopers, they were no use in the unexpected defensive war started by the German invasion.

Once the paratroopers had seized key points and airfields, the Soviet plan then called for huge numbers of reinforcements to be flown in. As well as building massive numbers of C-47 (Dakota) heavy transport planes under licence from the U. S. government, Stalin ordered a huge glider building programme. The ten different designs included Antonov's multi-seater assault glider the A-7 and the KZ-20, which could carry twenty soldiers.

The human cost of this extravagant military expansion was horrific. Having sold Russia's artistic treasures and vast reserves of gold, platinum and diamonds, the Bolsheviks began their notorious collectivisation programme. The peasants were driven into collective farms so that crops could be taken from them without payment. Ten to sixteen million died from the collectivisation and the resulting famine, compared with 2.5 million Russians in World War One. Yet Stalin sold five million tons of grain abroad every year.

Stalin Line

Some of the money was spent on the thirteen fortified regions which were built along the Soviet Union's western frontier, in a strip of territory unofficially called the Stalin Line. A complex system of combat and supply installations, armoured and built of concrete, was constructed along the 30-50km deep zone; there were also reinforced concrete underground premises to serve as storage depots and command posts.

The fortified regions were built with enormous effort and vast expense during the first two Five Year Plans. In 1938 it was decided to reinforce each region by building heavy artillery casemates. More than a thousand combat installations a year were concreted into the region.

In 1939 the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed. Once Poland had been partitioned there was no longer a neutral buffer zone. Stalin could have ordered the garrisons on the line to be strengthened and additional belts of fortified zones could have been constructed behind and in front of the existing line. But in fact the existing fortified regions were dismantled. Some military buildings were handed over to collective farms for vegetable storage, but most were buried or dismantled. In the spring of 1941 powerful explosions thundered across the 1,200km line as armoured firing positions were blown up.

The reason was simple: Stalin had decided to spread Bolshevism westwards, and the belt of fortifications would have blocked supply routes, creating dangerous bottlenecks for the millions of tons of ammunition, food supplies and fuel needed for the offensive.

Only a week after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, Stalin played his first dirty trick. Hitler began the war with Poland as they had agreed, but Stalin claimed that he was not yet ready. Hitler found himself on his own, and immediately at war with France and Britain as well. Meanwhile, Stalin marked the conclusion of this "non-aggression" treaty by introducing general military service.

A new "defensive" line was started in partitioned Poland, but although constructed very slowly and visibly, it remained a comparatively light and uncomplicated series of fortifications. Mines were removed from the vicinity of bridges and mile after mile of barbed wire was cut. Unnecessary bridges across rivers on the new frontier remained intact, and later greatly aided the German advance.

In the spring of 1941, the Germans began similar preparations. Both sides erected offensive fortifications. Before launching an attack great masses of troops would have to be concentrated in very narrow sectors: German troops in the Suwalki and Lublin salients and Soviet troops in the areas of Lvov and Bialystok. In order to assemble these shock groupings the secondary sectors were denuded of troops – the lightweight fortifications prevented them from being completely exposed.

With, by 1941, the last obstacles to the Red advance removed, the Soviet Union possessed thirty separate armies. This was the largest military force the world had ever seen and it could not be maintained for long without mass starvation. The plundering of neighbouring countries would have been the only means of paying for and justifying such a force.

Many of the best armies were not deployed to fight Germany but to invade virtually defenceless neutral states, as Stalin had already done throughout Eastern Europe. The 9th army was concentrated on the frontier with Rumania and an assault crossing of the Danube was planned by its 14th Rifle Corps. The 12th and 18th "mountain armies" were positioned to move south-west along the Carpathian mountains to cut Germany off from the Ploesti oilfield in Rumania and west into Czechoslovakia, which would enable Stalin to cut the Rumania-Germany oil pipeline. Without this irreplaceable Rumanian oil, the tanks, lorries, submarines, battleships and planes which were massed far away to the west would simply grind to a halt.

The seven armies in the Second Strategic Echelon included many thousands of men who had been released from concentration camps that spring to expiate their "guilt" by fighting for the Soviets. The generals and officers were also usually former political prisoners and were desperate to prove their worth. Their lives and those of their families were at stake. They were known as the "Black Divisions" because many still wore their black Gulag uniforms. The most powerful of the Second Echelon armies was the 19th, which was transferred from the North Caucasus to approximately 150km north of the Black Sea. It contained mountain rifle divisions which could also be used in Rumania. They were making their way to the frontier when Germany invaded.

They were not alone. In the final preparations for the attack on the West, millions of soldiers were still heading for the front in trains. Very often their ammunition and heavy weapons were being transported separately. Huge supply dumps were stockpiled just a few miles from the German lines. Most of the airforce were similarly exposed. For a few critical days, Stalin's mighty invasion force was incapable of defending itself.

Stalin believed that he had convinced Hitler that the Soviet Union was truly neutral and assumed that the Germans were busy finalising an invasion of Britain. Hitler's conquests had created an unprecedented situation in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Yugoslavia, France, Greece and Albania. Their armies, governments, parliaments and political parties had been destroyed. Stalin's huge armies were in an ideal position to take over Europe, but Hitler guessed Stalin's design so that even in 1945 the Soviets only got half of Europe, and some territory in Asia.

At a Politburo meeting on 21st June 1941 G. R. U. (Military Intelligence) chief General Golikov reported that there was a massive concentration of the German airforce on the Soviet border, enormous reserves of ammunition and a regrouping of German forces. He even knew the name of the operation – *Barbarossa*.

Frozen Wastes

Yet Stalin at first refused to believe what was happening. He had established a sophisticated intelligence network to give him long advance warning of a decision by Hitler to wage war in the frozen wastes of Russia. His key indicators were breathtakingly simple. For an army to survive the winter, every man would need to possess a thick sheepskin greatcoat. Soviet agents therefore kept a close watch for a sudden rise in the demand for sheepskins and a fall in the price of mutton as slaughter was stepped up. Meanwhile, other agents scoured rifle ranges for scraps of cloth used by German soldiers to clean their weapons. Soviet chemists then analysed them in order to find out whether the Germans had developed a gun oil which would not freeze in harsh weather. There was still no sign of such an oil – or of a non-freezing engine oil – in June 1941, so Stalin was convinced that Hitler had no intention of attacking him. Hitler would have his forces concentrated in France, or even fighting in England, as the Red Army cut off their only source of fuel oil, crashed into a virtually undefended Reich and then “liberated” the whole of Western Europe.

Hitler, of course, had not ordered such preparations because he had not planned on a war against Russia. Only in the spring of 1941 did intelligence reports of troop concentrations and Soviet moves to cut Germany's oil lifeline with Rumania force Hitler to take the desperate chance of opening a second front with a hasty pre-emptive strike.

Initially at least, the gamble paid off. Caught in transit or crammed together in their own start-off positions, whole Soviet armies were annihilated. Most of the airforce was destroyed on the ground. The thousands of lightly armoured assault tanks were virtually helpless, and forced to operate in the roadless wastes of Russia they were easily out-manoeuvred by the Germans' conventional cross-country tanks.

All this makes *Icebreaker* the definitive account of the build up to Operation Groza (“Thunderstorm”) – the Soviet conquest of Europe scheduled to begin early in the morning of Sunday 6 July 1941. Suvorov's revelations about the massive expansion of the NKVD (the blood-soaked forerunner of the KGB) are particularly chilling: these killers would have moved behind the assault troops to liquidate “class enemies.” The Bolshevik torture chambers and death pits which claimed millions of victims in the enslaved nations of the East would have spread throughout the West as well.

With Germany and France under the Soviet jackboot, Italy and Spain would quickly have fallen too. And Stalin's one million paratroopers would have made short work of seizing the airfields of southern England to clear the way for a full-scale invasion.

Lenin and his pupil Stalin never made any secret of their desire for a Second World War to establish a Communist Europe. For the fact that this monstrous plan failed, the pseudo-democrats, simpering priests and court historians have no-one to thank but Adolf Hitler. If it had not been for the man they love to hate, they would have been the first against the wall.

First appeared in issue 11 of *The Rune*



The Reichstag salutes after Hitler made a speech at the Berlin Kroll Opera House in 1939

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